

## **Infiltrating the space, hijacking the platform: Pussy Riot, Sochi protests, and media events**

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### **Abstract:**

The contemporary reformulation of the media events framework often focuses on the transformative role of mobile, video and social networking technologies in a global context, eclipsing another fundamental dimension: the geographically-bounded space of the media event. This article examines the surveillance and control of the physical space by organizers of the media event in an effort to control the wider global narrative extending beyond it, in this case the narrative of the controversial 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. For activists and other actors excluded from contributing to this narrative, infiltration of the physical space represents a potential vehicle for mobilizing media attention and engaging audiences with an alternative interpretation of the spectacle.

**Key words:** Media Events, Protest, Geography, Olympics, Russia, Pussy Riot, LGBT, Twitter

### **Introduction**

The contemporary reformulation of the media events framework often focuses, justifiably, on the transformative role of mobile, video and social networking technologies. When concentrating on these new media practices and the related changes to audience engagement and broadcasting formats, however, a particular element of Dayan and Katz' (1992) original media events framework is overlooked, if it is not eclipsed altogether: namely, the geographically-bounded space of the media event.

This article examines the centrality of the physical space of the media event in controlling the wider performance of the mediated narrative, using as a case study the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games. For the event organizers, the physical space is of increasing importance, as control and surveillance of the space provides an extended and militarized media infrastructure for constructing and protecting the global narrative extending beyond the event and the success of the event itself. For activists and other actors excluded from

contributing to that narrative, infiltration of the physical space represents a potential vehicle for mobilizing media attention and engaging audiences with an alternate interpretation of the spectacle. The continual performance of 'protest songs' in and around the physical spaces of the Sochi 2014 Olympic site by the Russian performance art group Pussy Riot will act as a test case study, where their readiness to storm the online discussion over Twitter with 'live' material and the ensuing confrontation, succeeded in rupturing the highly-controlled celebratory media events narrative embraced by the international broadcaster media.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental role of the geographical space of the media event has implications for understanding the:

- 1) physically situated and bounded dimensions of 'liveness' within the media events framework
- 2) increasing securitization of large scale global media events
- 3) potential for media events to act as a platform for alternative social and political agendas.

### **The Space and Time Dimensions of Media Events**

Amongst the original criteria for a media event was the 'live transmission' of the event, which is 'framed in time and space', where, in part, a sense of 'dramatic...significance' compels viewing (Katz 1980:86). The engagement of global television audiences, beyond the engagement of the physically situated spectators, is understood to be partially dependent on the temporal dimension of witnessing where the live quality of the unfolding event coverage provides for the shared but 'dim awareness' of the countless others who are also watching the same events (Katz 1980:84). In the earlier conception of integrative media events, the shared witnessing of unfolding historical events were meant to 'enthrall' the television audience but as Dayan (2010:26) notes this has been replaced with 'disenchantment' and 'cynicism' within the contemporary global audience. The contemporary audience is faced with multiple competing narratives of global broadcast communities and, more poignantly for this discussion, the diverse if not wholly discordant interpretations of events by audiences via online social platforms. This diminished power of the media event is joined by a raft of contemporary 'mediatized events' where the exceptional and historical nature of an event is diffused or absent, this succeeding to 'sustain and/or mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities' (Cottle 2006:415), but only to a lesser and inconsistent degree.

Though a tempered and more diffuse opportunity for engagement, the contemporary global media event is still tied to 'the cameras and the microphones...on the spot', which capture the limited spaces and times of the event as it occurs, bounded in both these dimensions so that the media technologies can 'encompass' the event wholly. This mediated engagement involves the 'transport of [the audience] simultaneously to where the event is taking place' (Dayan and Katz 1992:15). The power of mobilized sentiment,

however temporary, cannot be disentangled from the live mediated relationship with the geographical space. Dayan and Katz originally wrote that that such power rests with the 'rare realization of the full potential of electronic media technology' (1992:15), which today extends beyond traditional broadcast, through to online interpersonal and social networking platforms, as they are intermeshed with the provision of mobile telephones and many contemporary portable computing devices. When traditional media are challenged to accommodate and compete with new media and when the once prevalent distinction between online and offline has been overlaid with the 'seeping membrane' of mobile communication practices (Ito 2005:11), the full realization of technological potential is no longer solely the domain of broadcasters: activists, citizens and spectators now have the tools to potentially sustain and/or mobilize public sentiment.

Couldry and Hepp (2009:11) remind us that the 'performativity' of this narrative and engagement is always an articulation of power amidst a multiplicity of power centres and actors. Addressing further complications in the framework by the competition among media outlets and expanding mediated modes of spectatorship, commentary and production, they rearticulate contemporary global media events as '...certain situated, thickened, centring performances of mediated communication that are focused on a specific thematic core, cross different media products and reach a wide and diverse multiplicity of audience and participants' (Couldry and Hepp 2010:12)

The shifting and multiple opportunities of mediated participation extending from the contemporary media event offer truly global and potentially multifaceted opportunities for engagement with the Olympic spectacle. This, however, occurs amongst a heterogeneity of voices further complicating the diverse, ambiguous, if not also ambivalent sense of mediated engagement by the highly fragmented global media audiences.

The emergence of new mobile and online social networked spaces for participation has not gone unnoticed by the Olympic organizers and broadcasting partners. Sports media has been steadily commercialising online. Social network interactions compliment and extend their broadcasting coverage (Marshall, Walker and Russo 2010:269; Hutchins and Rowe 2014:12). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and media partners have attempted to both accommodate challenges from and harness the potential of blogging, online streaming, video-blogging and mobile viewing at successive Olympics (Goldsmith 2008; Miah, García and Zhihui 2008:328; Marshall et al. 2010:269). The growing use of mobile and social networking tools by athletes has become a new source of information for journalists (Hutchins 2011:243; Sanderson and Kassing 2011:120) and, in response, such use has been censured and strictly codified by the IOC (Hutchins and Mikosza 2010:286; Hutchins and Rowe 2014:15; IOC 2011:2). For this discussion, however, the use of mobile and networked communication can be understood as simultaneously a challenge to the monopolistic hold on media event narratives traditionally held by broadcasters and event organizers, as well as an emerging infrastructure for the securitization and control of event spaces.

## **Securing and Surveillance of the Sochi Olympic Games and Its Associated Narrative**

In today's context, that potential of media technology extends to more diverse means of event mediation and audience engagement than is offered by traditional broadcasting. Accompanying these format developments are vastly complex systems for securing and surveillance of the sites of the media events themselves. Many parallel technological developments in personal communication devices also, however, provide spectators, citizens and activists with the tools to record, disseminate media and communicate with countless global others from within the limited geographical space of the media event.

Leading up to the Sochi Olympics, the Russian State Duma enacted a number of laws, which were called by Boykoff (2013) 'a formidable political architecture to squelch dissent', followed by well-documented intimidation of activists, legal restrictions on their travel and arrests and detentions of protesters in the Sochi Area during the Olympics (Buchanan 2014).<sup>2</sup> These manoeuvres accompanied the controversial law banning 'homosexual propaganda' in public and in the media, nominally to protect minors from non-traditional vantage points. The United Nations Committee on Children's Rights has declared that this law jeopardises the physical safety of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) individuals, including children, while 'encouraging the stigmatization and discrimination' of LGBT communities in Russia (Associated Press 2014). This law has incited global protests, including calls for an Olympic Boycott, and has been linked to the decisions of many Western world leaders not to attend the games, as reported by RT International (formerly Russia Today) and the BBC World News (BBCWN) broadcasts examined in this study. It also, however, provided an opportunity for both the Russian state and the IOC to explicitly reinforce the Olympic Charter's ban on political protest in the media: 'No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas' (IOC 2013:93).

Against this backdrop of controversy and restrictions on political expression, the extensive resources for organizing the Olympics and other 'mega events' (Roche 2006) were employed to construct and disseminate a dominant narrative corresponding to the interests of the organizers, the hosting nation and the media partners. Dayan (2010:29) argues, however, that broadcast media have lost their previous claim to both events and audiences such that 'dominant events now serve as the contested ground for a multiplicity of media voices', each of which is vying for control and inclusion as a voice of the event.

In contrast to the original conceptualization of media events as planned and historic ceremonies, Katz and Liebes (2007) extend the media events framework to include the concentration of media events coverage on the unplanned and interrupting major news events associated with disaster, terror and war. They also, however, point to the fourth type represented by protest. They note protests are disruptive, yet are also coordinated in that the media and public are 'invited to attend' (Katz and Liebes 2007:161). Within this competitive media events context, the implications of Pussy Riot's protests and other Sochi

protests can be understood. These sorts of protests are coordinated to be disruptive of another media event by inviting, in a certain sense, antagonism resulting from political confrontation. Also inviting the mediated witnessing of the outcome by the spectators and journalists present, the global audiences become witnesses through the reach of mobile communications and online networks via the use of other handheld image and video recording devices.

Dayan extends this argument by suggesting that media events are not only a contested space but are susceptible to being 'hijacked', a word he uses to 'imply the sometimes forceful, but certainly involuntary or antagonistic, seizure of world attention by altering the expected and legitimated narrative of these singular moments' (2005 as cited in Price 2011:87). This notion is elaborated through the conflation of media events and globally networked media technologies within a single analytical category. Strictly defining a 'platform' as 'any mechanism that allows for the presentation of information from a sender to receiver', Price (2011:87) argues that media events have been underexplored as a 'platform' in themselves. Interrogating the use of the term 'platform' in a different debate, specifically relating to online content providers, Gillespie (2010:349, 350) reminds us that the word is a 'structural metaphor' similar to many other structural and spatial media metaphors: the term carries a metaphorical resonance for its 'architectural' notion of a raised platform, 'political' resonance related to the communication of political narratives beyond the architectural notion and a 'figurative' resonance relating to opportunity for action.

Each of these resonances contributes to the understanding of the Olympic media event as a platform: it is not only the temporary convergence of media infrastructure and global attention for the promotion of political narratives but also the opportunity for those who can access or seize that platform to obtain political voice.

The contemporary media event platform, as represented by the concentration of media professionals and the shared infrastructure of the IOC, host city and their partner organizations, however, is not acting in isolation. The diffusion of mobile communications technologies – in the pockets of citizens, attending spectators, athletes and activists - extends through the local mobile and Wi-Fi networks through to online social networking platforms and other communication networks. This represents an assemblage<sup>3</sup> of numerous physically located but also globally networked individuals. Their engagement with the media event further complicates the forms of mediated participation, witnessing and information dissemination, in addition to those afforded by the event platform.

There are two divergent conceptualisations of 'assemblage' that contribute to its usage here: firstly, the notion of 'situated performativity' and, secondly, the functional reach of numerous discrete mobile, networked and social media technologies. In his analysis of spatially situated face-to-face social 'performances', Goffman argued for greater attention to the 'assemblages of sign-equipment which...performers call their own for short periods of time' (1956:14). What Goffman would refer to as the 'setting' involves the media event as a geographical space where the event and media infrastructure are joined by the

ubiquity of personal communication devices, all of which become the 'equipment' for the performer or performers. These notions can be extended from the everyday context of Goffman's analysis to the hijacking of media events by protests. The second conceptualisation of assemblage is borrowed from notions of both institutionally-oriented 'surveillant assemblage' (Haggerty and Ericson 2000), which, in this case, would refer to both media outlets and event security, as well as socially-oriented 'monitoring assemblage' of personal everyday networked technologies (Andrejevic 2007:223). These latter notions of 'assemblage' have been defined as a 'multiplicity of heterogeneous objects, whose unity comes solely from the fact that these items function together, that they 'work' together as a functional entity' (Patton 1994 as cited in Haggerty and Ericson 2000:608).<sup>4</sup>

The Olympic redevelopment of the Russian host-city included the provision of broadband throughout the Sochi Area, fast and free Wi-Fi across all Olympic Media zones and sports venues, public Wi-Fi hotspots and a new mobile communication infrastructure in the region. This communication infrastructure became the vehicle for the state security apparatus to build one of most sophisticated surveillance complexes to date, which monitored and filtered all mediated interpersonal communication taking place during the Sochi Olympics (Soldatov and Borogan 2013; Walker 2013). The collection of mobile phone and Wi-Fi meta-data, the installation of 5500 video surveillance cameras and the use of drones during the Olympics allowed for all the movements and communications of individuals in the host city to be meticulously mapped (Soldatov and Borogan 2013). The security expert Andrei Soldatov suggested that visitors to Sochi 'should presume that all their communication devices are completely transparent for Russian security services' (Allen 2014) following his joint investigation with investigative journalist Irina Borogan for Privacy International and the Citizen Lab of the University of Toronto,

Pointing to the 'ever-present danger of appropriation' of the event and event narrative, Price (2011:89) suggests that 'physical modes of security', such as site access and press accreditation, were employed to solve this problem. An extension of this notion is proposed in this article to include surveillance and security of the sites. While directly justified by the threat of terrorism and the instability of the Caucasus region, the extent of the Sochi's surveillance infrastructure and the elaborate security of the host city and Games venues both serve as an extended militarized infrastructure for the media event platform and for the control of media narratives. Through control and surveillance of the physical spaces of the media event, the state and the IOC who organised the Games can assert a degree of control over the mediated narrative emanating from the event and extending beyond it.<sup>5</sup> Boykoff and Fussey (2013:254) argue that this securitization is an often overlooked Olympic legacy for each host city, to be passed on to the next, where the development of a 'sizeable security infrastructure' while justified by the need to deter terrorism serves rather to suppress activism alongside any other 'low-level incivilities' of local inhabitants that may interfere with the glossy presentation of a celebratory Olympic narrative.

## **Methodology and Data Collection**

This research was conducted as a separate study in parallel to the Sochi report in this issue, which tracked the international broadcasting coverage and social media conversations (specifically on Twitter) concerning the Sochi Olympics and related controversies. Social media data collection for this research drew primarily from the data collection for that wider Sochi report, while the broadcast monitoring extended beyond the primary project. This work draws heavily on Twitter analysis over the two-week period of the primary Olympic Games provided by A. Voss and I. Lvov of the wider Sochi report team. They also provided the results of additional social media dataset queries and visualizations for this research after some of the prominent tweets covered in this article related to Pussy Riot and the arrest of V. Luxuria – less important to the wider study – were identified in the ‘LGBT’ and ‘Putin’ keyword datasets.<sup>6</sup>

The broadcasting analysis and discussion within this article derives from the television news coverage of RT International and BBCWN, collected for analysis throughout the days of the Opening Ceremony and Closing Ceremony. In coordination with S. Hutchings and I. Yablokov, two additional sets of broadcasts were collected during the Olympic Games in Sochi, recorded at a single evening news time between the dates of 7 February 2014 and 23 February 2014. We collected data from the BBCWN flagship evening news program for the UK, Europe, the Middle East and Africa entitled ‘BBC World News Today’<sup>7</sup> at 19:00 GMT to 19:30 GMT<sup>8</sup> each weekday, along with the Saturday edition of the ‘BBC World News’ at 21:00 GMT to 21:30 GMT<sup>9</sup> and the Sunday ‘BBC World News’ at 19:00 to 19:30 GMT. Similarly, the 30-minute ‘RT News’<sup>10</sup> program from 19:00 GMT-19:30 GMT was recorded for each weekday and weekend day during the same period.

Analysis of this data specifically followed the forms of protest that took place during the Sochi Olympic Games time period. International broadcasting coverage and Twitter conversation relating to the Olympic protest represents the potential engagement with global audiences and, therefore, the potential disruption to the celebratory Olympic narrative or, at least, the potential coupling of the protest narrative with the Olympic narrative. The protest performance by Pussy Riot, their filmed attack by security forces and global sharing of this footage in a music video stood out amongst other protests for breaching both the broadcast news narratives and Twitter discussions examined by this study. The particular form of the protest, both physically situated in the host city and the sharing of its documentation online, offers a test case for examining protests and the relationship between the geographical space of media events and mobile reach of personal communication devices.

## **Analysis: Pussy Riot Storms the Platform**

Price’s notion of ‘seizing the Olympic platform’ resonates with the Pussy Riot case study in two ways: firstly, the infiltration of both the media event’s physical and mediated spaces ‘by storming (literally and figuratively) a platform media event so as instantly to control the

narrative' and, secondly, the power relations involved outline an 'asymmetrical' hijacking, 'where small, seemingly powerless groups gain momentary attention and sometimes enduring strength' (2011:86). Single acts of symbolic protest may seem insignificant compared to the planning and control of such large events and immense resources for constructing a particular global narrative. The violence such as the hostage taking at the 1972 Munich Games is not necessary, however, to hijack the Olympic platform when even the simple but powerful gesture of raised fists in Mexico City 1968 can also become a determining moment for the historical narrative of an Olympic Games (DeLisle 2011:49).

The sophistication of the media event platforms (in security, surveillance and breadth of broadcasting technologies) is challenged by the employment of those same technologies by citizens and activists. In the context of the Beijing Games, Humphrey and Finlay (2008:300) noted that the video and camera features on mobile phones and other portable devices, in combination with social media, provide the necessary tools to counter official narratives of the Games. This is characterised as 'sousveillance' (Mann, Nolan and Wellman 2002), a reversal of surveillance, whereby the individual(s) observe(s) and publicly hold(s) to account the surveillance actions of the authorities and institutions.

Throughout the second week of the Olympics, collaborators and members of Pussy Riot were involved in several video performances throughout the host city. On the Monday 17 February, two known members of the group and three other women were arrested by local police, reportedly in relation to a theft that had occurred in their hotel. Their release on the following day was besieged by reporters and, as the BBC reported, the activists ran down the street in their iconic balaclavas singing lines from their new protest song 'Putin will teach you to love the motherland', directly satirizing the attempts of the host-nation to rebrand itself domestically and globally using the Olympic platform (BBC 2014b).

Nadezhda Tolokonnikova from the group recounted to reporters the consistent detention by the police since their arrival on the prior Sunday as an occupation of this territory, because 'the city is under total police and security control' (BBC 2014b). Both the BBC and RT, among other media outlets, reported on this detention, publishing photos taken by Pussy Riot member Maria Alyokhina from within a police van and uploaded to her Twitter account. This use of mobile photography by the activists in the Olympic host city served to document their arrest. By uploading photos to Twitter, which were then disseminated by news media outlets, the documentation of the security forces reached wider audiences than possible through the regular social network channels used by the activists. This was just the first occasion of the group's successful 'sousveillance' at the Olympics, demonstrating their ability to represent recorded actions 'back to the public and to the authorities'. This will be used in the following example to call those authorities 'to account for the abusive tactics' employed (Humphreys and Finlay 2008:300).

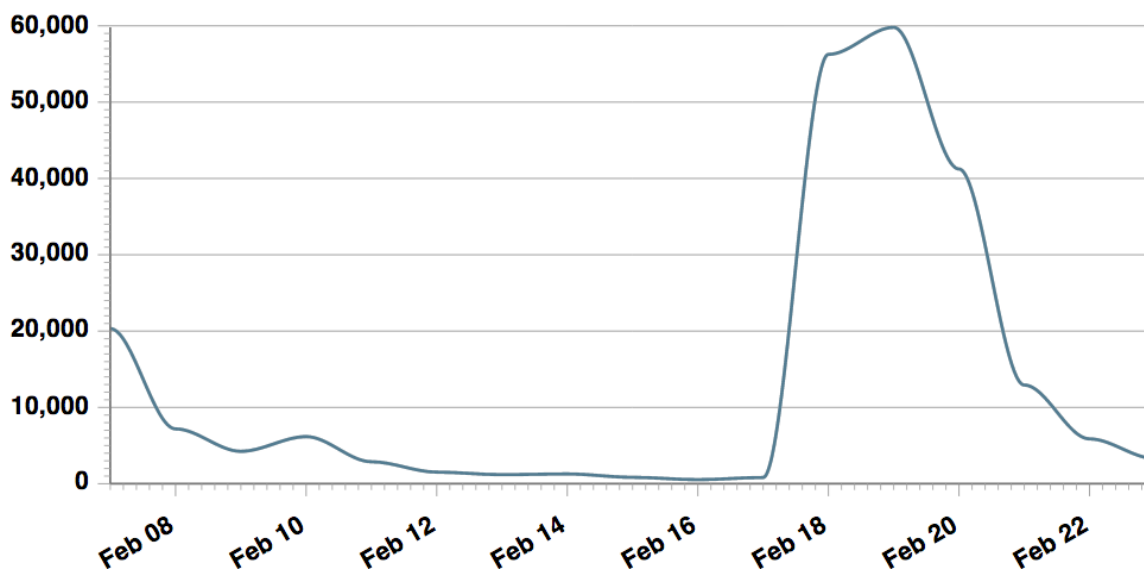
On Wednesday 19 February, five women and one man gathered with a group of camera-carrying collaborators and reporters in front of a large Olympic banner, 20 miles from the nearest Olympic venue. This was according to the online report by the BBC News (2014a), where they began a planned performance of their new song. The Olympic 'Cossack



Militia’ and other security forces attacked the performers with short leather whips,<sup>11</sup> used most often for horses and occasionally for crowd control. The video shows the assault where the performers were sprayed with a substance (reportedly pepper spray), whipped repeatedly and hit, even when being held to the ground (Walker 2014; BBC 2014b). The BBC reported that later that night four of the members staged an impromptu performance in front of Sochi City Hall and the Olympic Rings statue. In this instance, the police stood by and did not stop them, potentially already aware of the videos circulating online.

Both the activists and the media posted details of the attack on Twitter, while news organizations began reporting the incident. Within 24 hours of the attack, Pussy Riot released an edited music video online, containing footage of the attack in a compilation that spliced together other street performances in Sochi and the pre-recorded soundtrack of their satirical song. News outlets around the world (both broadcast and print) not only posted the initial videos and still photos of the attack in online articles but also posted the edited protest music video. These photos and videos went viral benefitting from both social media sharing and news outlet coverage.

According to the Sochi report in this issue, Pussy Riot received nearly 60,000 mentions on Twitter, with the initial arrest, subsequent attack and edited video release considerably increasing their presence within the Olympic-related discussion (See **Figure 1**).



**Figure 1:** Number of 2014 Olympic-related tweets containing ‘pussy riot’ or ‘pussyriot’. Graph provided by I. Lvov and A. Voss.

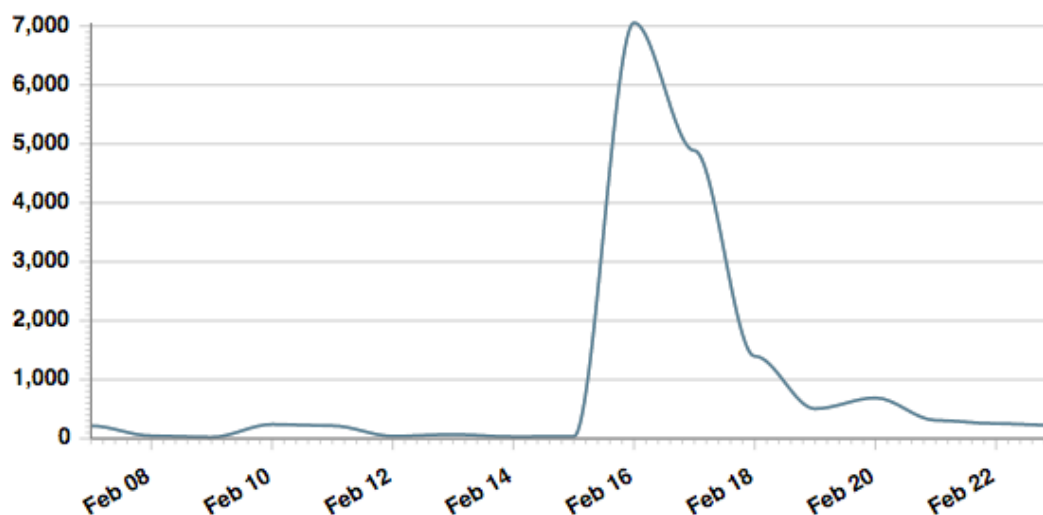
Their infiltration of the physical space of the media event and the online attention gained by their portable recordings precipitated two notable impacts in the Olympic narrative. Firstly, though minor in comparison to the hockey or figure skating controversies, the incident represented a rekindling of critical Olympic-related hashtags and keywords, most of which

had largely died down following the Opening Ceremonies.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, the incident not only translated into more than just online conversation but also signalled a rupture in the editorial consistency of the international broadcasters studied, who had until that point (as investigated by the wider Sochi report in this volume) tempered reporting on Olympic controversies in order to focus on sporting narratives during the Games following the Opening Ceremony. BBCWN aired a repeating segment about the attack throughout several evening news editions of 19 February and members of Pussy Riot were featured in interviews across other BBC services over the following weekend of the Closing Ceremonies. RT International did not broadcast the event on television but posted a video of the attacks online with the caption ‘Sochi Fails’, which was quickly removed but not before the prominent LGBT activist and journalist Masha Gessen had retweeted it.<sup>13</sup>

The significance of this ‘hijacking’ of the Olympic platform is more clearly discerned through the lack of specific coverage given by international broadcasters to other Olympic protests, two of which both sustained substantial Twitter conversation beyond the act of protest itself. The redesign of the search engine Google’s logo for the Olympics and in support of LGBT rights garnered substantial traction on Twitter (as discussed further in the Sochi report in this issue). It did not, however, receive coverage on the BBCWN or RT International evening news broadcasts, despite being the most-shared non-sport related meme of the time period studied. Though not a news outlet themselves, this did represent a challenge to the primary Olympic narrative by a major media power, not a traditional media power associated with the event but a new one contesting the consistency of the event narrative. Media events are, however, first and foremost a product of the television era, where visual and live coverage of the time and spaces of the events are tantamount to the broadcasting partnership. The absence of Google’s act of protest from the physical spaces of the Olympics distinguishes it from the Pussy Riot incident.

The second example involves the arrest of Italian television host, transgender LGBT rights activist and former Italian MP, Vladimir Luxuria. Dressed in rainbow colours (a symbol of the LGBT movement), Luxuria was taken away by ‘four unidentified men in a car with Olympic markings’ while trying to enter one of the Olympic Venues (BBC 2014a). Amongst Olympic-related tweets with the hashtag ‘#Luxuria’ and mentions of her personal twitter handle ‘@vladiluxuria’ began to appear in the datasets on the evening of her arrest, alongside numerous other hashtags in English and Italian, such as ‘#freeluxuria’ and variations on this theme. Though much lower in volume (**Figure 2**), these keywords still represented some of the most tweeted about (ranking between tenth to twentieth) keywords, alongside ‘LGBT’ and ‘Putin’, in the corpus over the days following her detention. Like Pussy Riot, Luxuria’s protest attracted the attention of reporters and, while many press wire and online sites of traditional media covered her detention and release, the international broadcasters in our study made no mention of it on air. The BBC did report briefly on her arrest and release but only in an online article about Pussy Riot members which appeared two days later. Luxuria’s protest was documented and disseminated by the professional media, yet the mediated aspect of her protest was passive and dependent on

the IOC accredited journalists. While this was similarly a documented infiltration of the physical spaces of the media event, the Pussy Riot incident was an orchestrated hijacking that coordinated the situated performance in physical space, with their own pre-planned documentation and sharing of output, alongside the throng of other camera-carrying witnesses and journalists. In this manner, their storming of the Olympic platform responded in kind to the coordinated control of media and physical spaces used to construct the very narrative they sought to challenge.



**Figure 2:** Number of 2014 Olympic-related tweets containing ‘#Luxuria’ or ‘@vladiluxuria’. Graph provided by I. Lvov and A. Voss.

## Discussion

The discrepancy between the treatment of the protests and the content of the protests themselves, whether V. Luxuria’s performative march or Pussy Riot’s song, is representative of a tenuous grip over the media event narrative. The Olympic narrative celebrating Russia’s apparent rebranding and re-emergence onto the world stage as a global power and, to a degree, her rehabilitation following the Cold War, was challenged neither by the protest lyrics being sung nor slogans spoken but by the spectacle of repression that ensued. This article does not set out to make causal links between those protests and later acts of cultural diplomacy, in particular because LGBT rights was just one of the many issues highlighted by the performance group.<sup>14</sup> The prominence of the Ukrainian crisis in the Western media at the close of the Olympics served to discredit Russia far more. Amidst the global protest over Russia’s silencing of LGBT minorities, the IOC had refrained from challenging the upcoming Winter Games host nation over the issue. Seven months after Sochi, however, the IOC added a more forcefully binding, though non-particular, anti-discrimination clause to which future host-nations must adhere, which is widely perceived as a response to the Sochi controversy (Gibson 2014).

Boykoff and Fussey's (2013:266) provocation that 'the ways in which the activism inspired by such intensive security operations is managed is likely to tell us much about whether any Olympic truce is volunteered or coerced' will now be considered. Pussy Riot's coordinated infiltration and hijacking of the physical and mediated spaces of the Sochi Olympics brings to light the growing securitization of these mega-events, which in turn highlights the fragility of the dominant narrative, the associated repression of alternate voices and the strict (if not violent) articulations of power employed in its construction. The militarized media strategy employed to secure the spaces and narrative of the Sochi Olympics has implications beyond the celebratory media events investigated in this issue. Efforts to promote a dominant media narrative can be understood in part as obstructing the processes necessary for the mobilization of collective sentiment around any alternate or competing narratives or social grouping.

Beyond the clear context of dominant and alternative narratives, a strategy of derailing opposing narratives through the control of physical spaces and mediated witnessing of media events emerges. This framework can be applied equally to celebration as to terrorism and - importantly for the concluding remarks below - also protest, revolution and war. Hindering the alignment of Dayan and Katz's original conditions for a media event presents a method to hinder the coalescing of collective sentiment around any emerging socio-political narrative or collective identity.

There is a frightening symmetry between the militarized media strategy employed at the Sochi Olympics and the 'information war' that surrounded the unfolding crisis in Ukraine and the Russia's annexation of Crimea. The media event's collective sentiment is constituted, in part, by the live mediated witnessing of unfolding historic events, the multiple vantage points of coverage and the shared experience of participation, even if that participation only takes place through the media. In revolution and war, broadcasting facilities are often of primary importance to military strategy (Parks 2013; Katz and Liebes 2007:162), yet what seems to have occurred in Crimea and later in Eastern Ukraine is far more nuanced. The annexation of Crimea and the unfolding crisis was defined by delayed, ambiguous and contradictory statements by the Russian government as to whether or not the unmarked 'little green men' in Crimea were Russian state forces (BBC 2015).

Threats to the safety of media professionals in the area were made.<sup>15</sup> The Crimea television channel ceased broadcasting and was replaced with the Russian state-owned broadcaster in Crimea (BBC 2014c; CPJ 2014; RSF 2014). Mobile<sup>16</sup> and online communications were reportedly also partially blocked and disrupted (BBC 2014d). In combination, these circumstances precluded the possibility of shared witnessing of unfolding events over television networks, while also partially limiting even the deliberation of events by citizens using mobile phones and online networks. This was also accompanied by the contestation of international media accounts of the event by the Russian state media being broadcast in the region. The enthralling urgency of participation in a media event, added to by the historical sense of occasion (planned or otherwise) of the then still

unfolding Ukrainian protest turned revolution, was left muddled in ambiguity and misdirection.

While Kiev's Maidan protests can be understood as a protest media event, what followed in Crimea was the orchestrated obstruction of any further media event narratives contrary to Russian interests, by masking and introducing bias into aspects of the Crimea military occupation and annexation. This could have contributed to the mobilization of collective sentiment against those actions. This was accomplished by applying a militarized media strategy over the geographical spaces of the potential event. Outside of celebration and beyond the scope of temporally limited events such as the Olympics, obstructing the conditions of engagement, live nature and 'performativity' that are so central to the integrating function of media events can also serve to hinder the mobilization of audiences around existing narratives of competing powers or the emerging narratives of newly diffused positions of power.

### **Biographical note:**

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## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> As investigated in the wider Sochi report in this issue.

<sup>2</sup> Formally, a separate and restricted 'protest zone' was established away from Olympic venues, and if any protest did occur there, they were too far removed from the media spotlight, given their location, according to Human Rights Watch, 'in a small village approximately 15 kilometers from the Olympic Park – which would require permission from three government agencies, including the Federal Security Service, to use' (Buchanan 2014). The protests referred to in this article occurred not just in and around Sochi, outside of the Olympic venues, but also outside of the 'protest zone'.

<sup>3</sup> A further context where the 'media event assemblage' emerges is in relation to the horrific spectacles of small scale or 'lone-wolf' terror-related attacks such as the murder of Lee Rigby in London 2013, where no media event platform was present, only a crowd of mobile phone carrying citizens (Hutchings and Burchell forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> According to Haggerty and Ericson, it is the abstraction of bodies and events from their territorial setting into a 'series of discrete flows' that is crucial for the media event (Haggerty and Ericson 2000). These flows, however, are not the automated data-based flows attached to their concept of the 'surveillant assemblage' but the flows of mobile uploads, online sharing and social networking that form the foundation of Andrejevic's 'monitoring assemblage', relating to 'lateral' or 'peer-to-peer' surveillance as emerges from the practice of individuals on a daily basis (Andrejevic 2007:223).



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<sup>5</sup> For more in depth analysis of security and surveillance measures for host cities and mega-event sites, see (Bennett and Haggerty 2012; Boyle and Haggerty 2009; Fussey and Armstrong 2011).

<sup>6</sup> In particular, on 16 February, the 'freeluxuria' keyword features prominently in the 'LGBT' dataset, as the sixth most mentioned term alongside LGBT keywords ('vladimirluxuria' being thirty-fourth and 'luxuria' thirty-ninth). This was followed on 17 February by the appearance of 'transgender' as seventh in the same set, and 'freeluxuria' fifteenth, as well as 'luxurialibera', as well as 'freeluxuria' and 'trans' in and around those days. In the 'Putin' keyword dataset, 'Luxuria' and 'freeluxuria' are the sixth and seventh most mentioned keyword, alongside the 'Putin' keywords on 16 February and fifth on 17 February, but this dropped off after her release. These hashtags and keywords also feature, though less prominently, in the Sochi problems dataset where they hover around the fortieth to fiftieth mark in the whole corpus on the days identified above, which is quite prominent given the glut of sports related keywords that dominated those datasets.

<sup>7</sup> Often called 'BBC World News Today with Zeinab Badawi' when this anchor was hosting the show, which was most often the case during this study.

<sup>8</sup> Though this is a 30-minute program, it repeats at 19:30 GMT and 20:00 GMT, the material is not wholly consistent between broadcasts, depending on breaking news and reorienting of the news running order. As a precaution, the three editions were recorded. The later evening news broadcasts were monitored on an event-specific basis. This program was selected in contrast to the BBC World News America, timed for 22:00 GMT to be the flagship evening news program for American time zones and the Newsday program 23:00 live from London and Singapore that acts as a final news update for Europe and the morning news for Asia.

<sup>9</sup> The 21:00 GMT BBC World News was selected because there was no equivalent half hour show on the Saturday schedule. Given the possible programming changes related to the later time, the 10 minute 'BBC World News' Saturday edition at 20:00 GMT – 20:10 GMT was also recorded in case of any discrepancies.

<sup>10</sup> There was no distinct flagship news program or time slot on RT International, rather there were 30-minute news broadcast on the hour throughout the day. Much of these broadcasts are repeated in their entirety across several timeslots. This timeslot was chosen so that if breaking current events were included, then the time of broadcast would not deviate from the BBC World News broadcasts. Similarly, the primary RT News channel was chosen over RT America channel to ensure that broadcasting audiences were similar to the BBC World News Today.

<sup>11</sup> Cossack or 'Nagaika' whips.

<sup>12</sup> See the wider Sochi report in this issue for the other exceptions, such that the critical Putin-related tweets demonstrated a resurgence of critical Olympic tweets chronologically parallel to the simmering Ukrainian crisis.

<sup>13</sup> A subsequently edited version of an online article of the attack with photographic stills, rather than the video, of the attack was still available at the time of writing with a similar but veiled reference to the hashtag #SochiFails in the title (RT 2014).

<sup>14</sup> See a translation of the song's lyrics into English for further detail, posted by *The New Republic* alongside the music video itself (Ioffe 2014).

<sup>15</sup> This strategy continued in the eastern regions of Ukraine as destabilization spread and the Ukrainian government responded in kind with a similar strategy to protect its 'information space' as a matter of 'national security' (Ennis 2014; Tvsetkova 2014).

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<sup>16</sup> This form of disruption follows on surveillance oriented intimidation in the form of 'ominous' SMS text messages to the mobile phones of Maidan protesters in Kiev in late January reportedly stating: 'Dear subscriber, you are registered as a participant in a mass disturbance' (Murphy 2014).